

# Final Hon

**T**HEY are just words, but they carry a powerful message: “This flag is presented on behalf of a grateful nation as an expression of appreciation for the honorable and faithful service rendered by your loved one.”

Spoken when presenting the United States flag to a family member of a deceased service member, retiree or veteran, these words come near the conclusion of what most service members consider the most revered ceremony conducted by the armed services — the military funeral.

The military funeral is a nation’s ultimate tribute and a sad but honored ceremony performed by units throughout the Army.

The Fort Leavenworth, Kan., Headquarters Company Combined Arms Center funeral detail conducts ceremonies in Iowa, Minnesota and 37 counties across northeast Kansas and northwest Missouri. It’s a wide jurisdiction that demands time and commitment from soldiers.

According to MSG Alexander Fritz, CAC’s funeral detail performed more than 200 ceremonies in 1998.

Fritz, former NCOIC of the Adjutant General’s office of which Fort Leavenworth’s Casualty Branch is a part, said serving on a funeral detail, though time-consuming, may be the best job a soldier could ever have.

“Being part of a funeral team does take commitment,” he said. “But of all the taskings that are available for soldiers to excel at, this is the one that truly provides the most personal reward.”

The detail gives young soldiers an opportunity to go through a ritual of life they possibly have not experienced before, he said, and to hear of the

SPC Christopher J. Dunphy



**Members of Fort Leavenworth’s Combined Arms Center funeral detail fire a salute during a recent ceremony.**

exploits and experiences of the generations before them.

“Most of the deceased are from an older generation,” Fritz said. “Being part of the funeral, listening to the service or to the family members, gives soldiers an idea of the sacrifices those men and women made prior to this point in life. This is the detail that causes the soldier to reflect.”

Although assignment to the funeral detail at Fort Leavenworth lasts at least three months, soldiers often extend their commitments, Fritz said.

“One soldier asked to stay on the detail for a year,” he said. “She worked her regular job and continued with the funeral detail because she was getting that much out of it.”

“When you consider what these soldiers go through — standing in cold or in sweltering heat in their class As — and then wanting to extend that experience, then you know that there’s something they gain from this detail. That’s what duty, honor and country is all about. It’s an experience where soldiers can feel something bigger than themselves.”

SSG William Dickson, former NCOIC for funeral detail Team A, agreed, saying he’d like to see every soldier have the opportunity to be on a funeral team.

“Each funeral we’ve performed has affected in some way every soldier



who has participated. Some may start out thinking it’s just another detail you have to do, but that changes when you’re there and you begin to hear about what these people have done.”

Dickson remembers one experience especially.

“There was one funeral where afterwards the vet’s daughter came up to thank us, and then the vet’s friend arrived and began to tell us about the man — a veteran of three wars, including Vietnam, where he was actually buried alive as a POW.

SPC Christopher J. Dunphy is a staff writer for the Fort Leavenworth Lamp.

# ors

Story by  
SPC Christopher J. Dunphy



Melissa Davis

*"I've been in the Army 16 years, and I've had my share of taskings. This by far has been the most rewarding."*

always easy keeping your emotions intact while doing a presentation paying respect to fallen comrades for their service to their country."

It can be an emotionally charged event, but an experience Dickson is glad not to have missed.

"Sometimes, when I would tell people I was on the funeral team, they would say, 'Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.' But for me, it was a very meaningful experience," he said. "I've been in the Army 16 years, and I've had my share of taskings. This by far has been the most rewarding."

He said the greatest reward has been in the responses received from the deceased's family.

"The families I've seen seem very appreciative of the honors we've given," he said. "At times I've heard words to the effect that the deceased 'deserved this.'"

"And I don't think that's a selfish statement. It's just something they felt he or she was due, and were very comforted that it was given. That's what makes it all worthwhile and I'm just glad that I could be a part of it." □



SPC Christopher J. Dunphy

Hearing that, how could I complain about a little extra duty?"

Dickson admits some soldiers do have difficulty adjusting to the funeral detail. He said dealing with death can be stressful, especially for young soldiers who aren't ready to face their own mortality.

"The experience does change you," he said. "Especially when you're burying someone who was on active duty and closer to your own age. It makes you stop and think, 'Hey, this could be me.'"

**The flag-draped casket is one way in which the nation honors its deceased service members during a military funeral.**

He said another difficulty involves the emotional level and the funeral detail members' responsibility to always maintain soldierly bearing.

"It takes a level of restraint to do this job sometimes, because of the feelings involved," he said. "Since my job has involved presenting the flag to the deceased's family, I've had to look into their faces. And I tell you it's not

**One challenge for funeral detail soldiers is learning to maintain a soldierly bearing during often very emotional services.**